

Improving National Security “Value”

By
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The military services don’t face the discipline of the market; those survival-of-the-fittest forces that make businesses adapt or go broke (or alternatively, get bailed out by taxpayers). The real discipline the military services face is driven by 1) meeting the national and international security commitments the United States has signed up to and, 2) funding. But as a great man told me, if it ain’t funded, it ain’t.

Even before a special ops team took out terror-master bin Laden, it’s been a foregone conclusion defense spending will be cut. About a year ago, spending cut advocates called for [about a trillion dollars in defense spending reductions over ten years](#) which approximated the amount in [the President’s debt commission](#). Only a few weeks ago, President Obama called for another [\\$400 billion in defense cuts over 12 years](#).

These proposed cuts exceed the [reductions already laid into](#) the President’s FY 2012 budget request and other voices are piling-on in advocating for defense [manpower cuts of one-third](#) all the way up to [40 percent of the entire DoD](#). OK, those voices may appear in the *New York Times*, but with the face of terrorism now [blown off](#), the calls will grow louder and more frequent.

As such, military and defense leadership will be well-advised to reframe near-certain funding reductions as an opportunity (albeit a really painful one) to create more security “value” for the nation. Creating national security value means this: providing more national security benefit relative to our national security spending. While the military services can’t control the funding outcomes that will emerge from Congress or the taskings our national leadership will require, with a coherent strategy as a guide, the outcomes can certainly be influenced.

[Steven Covey](#) would offer a first step in creating more national security value is to focus on the outcomes we’re looking to achieve, that is, to begin with the end in

mind. Supporting this, we need to pursue and accomplish the correct national security missions before we focus on doing those national security missions correctly. Regarding specific national security threats, my crystal ball is no more functional than the next person's (depending on who is sitting next to me), so what follows is speculative and suggestive, and is not prescriptive.

Maybe this means creating more security value by better balancing spending on the most consequential security threats (near-peer war, nuclear terrorism, WMD attack, or even nuclear war) versus the more-likely security threats (terrorism). Maybe it means more funding for protective programs like missile and civil defense. Maybe it means [plussing-up diplomatic initiatives](#) at the expense of day-to-day military operations. Maybe it means freaky-deaky stuff like investing in genetically enhanced soldiers, manipulating the electromagnetic spectrum to our will, or directed energy weapons.

Or, maybe it means none of the above, because we first need to debate and then establish exactly what we need to do (and are willing to not do) and why we're doing it. Cutting civilians and contractor support, reducing military personnel, and dragging out investment programs are merely reactions to funding cuts. Those actions are a sort of funding triage and they do little to serve to shape the future beyond meeting topline spending constraints. So what's a Department of Defense to do?

Drawing on Covey, industry uses a pretty basic model when facing these sorts of dilemmas: first, identify and preserve core (essential) missions; next, identify the least value-added, most easily replaceable missions; finally, privatize, outsource, or divest ourselves of the least-essential missions. While that's a highly simplified model and is easier said than done given differing constituencies, the reality is the Department of Defense needs to stop doing some of the things that in the past have been viewed as high priority or even essential. Seeking efficiency and reducing waste is all fine and good, but if we're highly efficient at all the wrong things--things that add little value to (or gasp! even reduce) the nation's security--our military won't be able to fulfill its charter. We need to think about doing less-

-a lot less--of the national security work that creates the least national security value.

So what are the low security value-added activities we could divest ourselves of? At the top of my own list has to be an indefinite moratorium on nation-building. While western democracy generally works well for western democracies, it is clearly not a form of government that is well-suited to a cram-down on unready or resistant societies. We should also consider massive reductions in military humanitarian relief efforts, the type that's been provided in Japan following the tsunami, and in Haiti following the earthquake. Is it painful to minimize or eliminate such capabilities? Will there be weeping and gnashing of teeth? Yes, especially from those who view the military as a sort of uniform-wearing Peace Corps. But can others (nation-states, charities, and non-governmental organizations) help do the work? Yes.

Similarly there are some U.S. security partnerships where we do the heavy lifting and others ride free (or very nearly free), like many of the Western Europe nations of NATO. Dialing back our NATO commitment is not without risk and certainly China and Russia would applaud such a move. However, if what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has said is true, that U.S. [debt is the nation's most serious security threat](#), bold thinking and bold action are needed. It's even possible a carrot-like conventional NATO draw-down could be what prompts the Russians to reduce their massive advantage in tactical nuclear weapons and delivery systems (or maybe not...).

Now as far as I'm concerned, that's about it for the "easy" kills and the *really* hard divestiture thinking remains. And how hard is hard? Well, consider this: all four of the services have their own air forces; the Air Force, the intelligence community, and NASA all have their own space forces; our nuclear deterrent force is based on a triad of land and sea-based ICBMs and manned bombers, and; the nation has a massive intelligence bureaucracy. In all these cases, are we talking about a duplication of effort, or are we looking at useful robustness and efficiency-adding intergovernmental competition?

As painful as it is to divest, it's likely to create better security value for the nation (as well as being a better national survival mechanism) than losing core military competencies at the expense of sustaining or developing marginal military competencies. Meeting funding bogeys by a thousand cuts is business as usual: it's the path of least resistance, offends the fewest 'tribes,' and spreads the pain across multiple programs. But the programmer's mantra of "fund it or kill it" is truism for a reason: it's true. And it's how you get the best national security return.

While debate on the nation's deficit moves forward, it's also possible that entitlement programs will end up bearing a more equitable part of the share-line. But regardless, let's accept that some programs, missions, and capabilities create a disproportionate national security value and pursue those efforts with full vigor. Leadership is about setting priorities and when everything's priority one, nothing's priority one.

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